"The Art of Storytelling: Plains Indian Perspectives" PowerPoint — Grade Level: 7th-12th grades

Subject(s): Art, Social Studies/Montana State History, IEFA

Duration: One fifty-minute class period

Description: This PowerPoint will introduce students to Plains Indian ledger art and other forms of pictographic art produced on the Plains.

Goals: Students will learn about pictographic art and how it evolved; the role of pictographic art in Plains Indian society; how it inspires artists today; and this art form's great power and beauty.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Communicate an understanding of ledger art (whose perspective is seen and told) and its history.
- Understand that studying art can provide insight into another culture.
- Understand that federal Indian policy affected Montana Indians, including their art.
- Recognize that Plains Indian pictographic art reflects both the style and experiences of individual artists and an artist's tribal affiliation.
- Understand that culture is not static.

Content Standards Addressed:

- Arts Content Standard 5: Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods.
- Arts Content Standard 6: Students make connections among the Arts, other subject areas, life, and work.
- Essential Understanding 1: There is great diversity among the twelve tribal nations of Montana.
- Essential Understanding 5: Federal policies, put into place throughout American history, have affected Indian people and still shape who they are today.

Materials:

- PowerPoint (http://mhs.mt.gov/Portals/11/education/IEFA/Grades7-12TheArtofStorytelling.pptx) and script, below.
- Laser pointer (optional)
- Laptop projector

Procedure:

- Print either this script or the script with accompanying slides. For the script only, print pages 2 through 6 of this document. To print the script with accompanying slides, open the PowerPoint. Select "Print," making sure that "Notes Pages" is selected in the "Print What" dialogue box.
- Review the script and PowerPoint before presenting and adapt as needed to your students' interest, attention span, and grade level.

Assessment: Completed worksheet (See Worksheet 1 for the lesson plan "Exploring Influences and Perspectives through Ledger Art" (http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt).

Teaching Note: This PowerPoint lesson may be used as part of the lesson plan "Exploring Influences and Perspectives through Ledger Art" or as a stand-alone presentation.

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Script for PowerPoint

[Slide 1]

This presentation explores pictographic art from the collections of the Montana Historical Society. Although this style of art is often referred to as "ledger art," pictographic art was, and still is, produced using different "canvases"—including rocks, cliffs, hides, clothing, tipi liners, bound ledger books, and other types of paper. Most often, it was produced to tell a story about important events that happened in a particular person's life. It also sometimes depicts historic events significant to a larger group. In many of these works, the artist's intent is clear. In others, the original meaning remains a mystery. In all cases, however, the artwork is stunning, powerful, and fascinating.

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The first Montanans left their mark on the landscape, carving or painting images on cave walls, cliff faces, and other stone surfaces. They employed two main techniques in producing these images—***petroglyphs***, like this one, were carved into stone using tools made of harder stone or, later, metal. **[Advance PowerPoint]** ***Pictographs*** were images painted onto the surface of the stone using natural pigments created from such things as plants, berries, and ground minerals.

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This petroglyph came from the Ellison Rock near Colstrip. The carving is at least 350 years old and may be as much as 2,000 years old. **Ask/discuss:** What do you think this image represents? **Answer:** This type of figure is known as a shield-bearing warrior. Shield-bearing warriors are a distinctive rock art motif, which depict an individual holding a large circular shield that obscures the majority of his body. Often the head and feet are exposed, and hands and weapons are occasionally depicted. In many cases the figures wear horned headdresses. Depictions of these figures are widely distributed throughout western North America, extending from Alberta south into New Mexico and Texas and from western Nevada to central Kansas (Source: David Moyer, birchwoodarchaeology.com/files/A_case_of_Mistaken_Identity_Shield_Bearing_Warriors.pdf). There is much that we don't know about shield-bearing warriors—whether they symbolize specific individuals or if they are generic images, whether they represent a historical event or if they were religious symbols.

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Rock art is the earliest surviving art that we know of in Montana, but early peoples likely painted hides as well. The oldest hide paintings that have survived are a particular type of ledger art known as winter counts. Winter counts are graphic calendars that record the passage of time by documenting one notable event for each year. The yearly cycle began with the first snowfall of the year and ended with the following year's first snowfall. Each fall as the weather cooled and snow was anticipated, elders would gather to discuss the things that had happened since the last "first snow." Then, they would choose one event to symbolize that year. **[Advance PowerPoint]** An artist would draw a symbol representing that event on the hide, over time creating a record of the tribes' history. For example, this symbol, "Stars in the Sky," refers to a spectacular meteor shower known to have occurred on November, 12, 1833. **[Advance PowerPoint]** This symbol commemorated the death of Sitting Bull, who was shot and killed in December 1890 by Indian police attempting to arrest him on the Standing Rock Reservation. These recorded symbols didn't tell the whole story—but they did help the tribe remember and keep track of its history.

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Winter counts were created for communal use in recording a band's history, but many Plains Indian men also produced personal narrative art. They painted scenes on buffalo robes and other animal hides, and later on canvas cloth and paper. These scenes frequently chronicled the man's personal exploits, memorializing and making public his heroic deeds. In addition to winter counts, another specific outlet men used to display their skill as artists and prowess as warriors were tipi liners. As the name implies, tipi liners were hung around the interior wall of the tipi. These liners served a dual purpose within the tipi, both practical and social. On the practical level, it provided an air space that helped insulate the lodge against winter cold and summer heat. **[Advance PowerPoint]** Socially, liners were decorated to publicize a man's war record, thus declaring his status within the tribe, much like a modern-day professional would by hanging his or her diplomas on the wall for all to see.

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Indian warriors also decorated the robes they wore with images that depicted their feats of bravery and accomplishments in battle. A young Crow warrior named White Swan painted the lower half of this beautiful robe. White Swan served in the U.S. Army as a scout during the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. A prolific artist, he often depicted events from this famous battle in his artwork.

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However, on this robe he illustrates his exploits in intertribal warfare. Here among other heroic deeds, he is shown counting coups on his enemy and stealing a gun. White Swan—the central figure—is identifiable as the one taking the gun because of the characteristic Crow hairstyle. In these biographical paintings, white men were commonly shown wearing hats and shoes with pronounced heels, while their horses wore saddles and bridles. When depicting their other enemies, the artist relied upon conventions and characteristics that were common among that particular tribe such as hairstyles, breechcloths, and moccasins.

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A different artist, or artists, painted the battle scene in the upper half of this robe. **[Advance PowerPoint]** We know this because the artistic style is different on the two halves of the robe. And, while men normally painted the narrative scenes, **[Advance PowerPoint]** women were generally responsible for producing beadwork, like the strip you see here.

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The unidentified artist who painted the upper half of the robe may have been Curley, another Crow warrior who also served as a U.S. scout during the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Although this cannot be verified, the composition of several of the warriors resembles ledger images that we know Curley painted. Curley utilized a unique and lively graphic style by portraying warriors with elongated bodies, small curved feet, and no hands. The warrior on the right was produced by Curley in 1886 while he was encamped for the winter on Hide Creek near Meteetse, Wyoming.

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In addition, this 1880s photograph shows Curley wearing the White Swan robe, which illustrates how these robes also provided a utilitarian purpose by providing warm winter wear. **[Advance PowerPoint]** Note that light areas in the photos are dark on the actual beaded strip. The discrepancy is due to the type of photographic emulsion available to photographers in the early 1880s. Orthochromatic film was not sensitive to blue, and blue would appear lighter in the final print. Panochromatic film, which is sensitive to all colors, was not available in the 1880s.

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Indians had been creating art for thousands of years before European artists came to the Great Plains. George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, who toured the region in the early 1830s, were the first Euro-American artists to travel to this region. They not only documented the lives of the peoples in the area, but they also brought a new artistic style and new art materials to the Northern Plains.

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Both Catlin and Bodmer painted portraits of the Mandan warrior Mah-to-tope (Four Bears) on separate trips to the region. They may also have supplied him with paper and pencils, because Mah-to-tope created the earliest known surviving works of ledger art—an art form that combines traditional subject matter with new imported materials.

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Montana Indians continued their artistic traditions long after Euro-Americans arrived on the Plains, but they also adapted to new conditions and incorporated new materials introduced to them. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Plains Indians still obtained most of what they needed from nature, as they had for thousands of years, but they also traded for what was useful to them (note the pot and clothes made from trade cloth in this picture). In addition to everyday items like pots and cloth, they also gained access to paper, pencils, watercolors, and canvas—first from early explorers and traders who came into the West in the early part of the nineteenth century and later from Indian agents and the military during the second half of the century. The result was a vibrant new artistic expression deeply based in traditional art forms.

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To create their drawings, Plains Indians used whatever kind of paper was available to them: lined paper, foolscap, newsprint, books, or even old letters. However, the most readily available paper throughout the 1800s was lined paper taken from account books called ledgers. Thus, the term "ledger art" began to refer to all Plains Indian artworks on paper, whether or not the artist used actual ledger paper.

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Most ledger art was produced from the 1860s to the 1900s during a time of great change. Plains Indian artists continued their long tradition of portraying narrative scenes of heroic accomplishments, but as the artists transitioned from traditional Plains life to reservation living, they embraced the use of paper, pens, pencils, inks, and watercolors, and their artistic style evolved. This large drawing by Hidatsa warrior Elk Head reveals important events in his life, **[Advance PowerPoint]** among them Elk Head's mother being shot at by a Sioux warrior while she is carrying the baby Elk Head, **[Advance PowerPoint]** and a later fight between Elk Head and the Cree. In addition to his many military encounters, he also documents everyday life, **[Advance PowerPoint]** including a woman paddling a bull-boat, painted lodges, and animals.

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In 1884, White Bear, a seventeen-year-old Cheyenne warrior, was imprisoned in the territorial prison at Deer Lodge. There he met Elk Head, a fellow inmate who had been imprisoned since 1879. When they met, Elk Head was about thirty-five years old. Despite the difference in age, both men were experienced, battle-hardened warriors as well as talented and skilled artists in the warrior art tradition. During their imprisonment, they both created wonderful works of ledger art, and although they came from different tribes that sometimes warred with one another, they collaborated on at least one piece. If this drawing is divided roughly on an axis from the upper right-hand corner to the lower left corner, it is believed that White Bear created the top half and Elk Head created the lower half.

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Elk Head was sentenced to Deer Lodge prison in 1879 for committing a murder, the exact circumstances of which are unknown. Elk Head's pencil on paper drawings done while he was in prison document his pre-prison life: He drew his exploits, accomplishments, and other significant events in a finely detailed and animated style. Elk Head was released in 1885, having earned four years off his sentence "by his excellent conduct." We do not know what happened to him after his release.

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White Bear was one of several Northern Cheyenne men sentenced to the territorial prison for burning buildings on the Alderson ranch (near present-day Lame Deer) in retaliation for the ranch hands' attack on their chief, Black Wolf. White Bear's detail and the visual excitement he conveys in this picture reveal his pleasure in remembering an exhilarating event, a battle between the Cheyenne and Shoshone. After serving one year of his five-year sentence, White Bear was pardoned and released. He died from tuberculosis shortly thereafter.

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Each tribe had its own style of ledger art. While Cheyenne like White Bear drew fairly realistic figures, Blackfeet artists painted in a more symbolic style. These two pieces of painted canvas are fragments of a once larger piece commissioned from the elderly Blackfeet warrior, Stingy with His Tobacco, by the Great Northern Railway to decorate the interior of its Glacier Park Lodge. Many of Stingy with His Tobacco's exploits are highlighted, including fighting the enemy, killing a grizzly bear, and being wounded while hunting a buffalo. The painting was created in 1916, two years before the artist's death at the age of seventy-eight.

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Like all art, pictographic art used both common symbols and also provided room for personal expression. Although each individual artist had his own specific style and each tribe had its own particular conventions, some details were common to many pictographic pieces across the Northern Plains. **[Advance PowerPoint]** For example, short penciled dashes often indicate footprints, **[Advance PowerPoint]** while U-shaped marks often indicate horse tracks. **[Advance PowerPoint]** A circle drawn around combatants generally represents a depression or fortified position. These common pictographic symbols are part of what make it possible to "read" the paintings in order to understand the story the artist is trying to tell.

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Today's contemporary native artists continue the long tradition of chronicling their culture and histories through art. Some reference the ledger art tradition in their paintings in both obvious and not-so-obvious ways. Their artwork reflects a commitment to tradition and to the artists' twentieth-century Indian identity, an identity that remains as vital today as it was in years gone by.

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This production is provided through a partnership between the Montana Historical Society and Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education for All Division. All objects depicted are from the collections of the Montana Historical Society.